

Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

Scanned Record Cover Page

Inventory No:	BOS.11322
Historic Name:	Congregation Sharei Tfila Synagogue
Common Name:	Mount Calvary Holy Church
Address:	15 Otisfield St
City/Town:	Boston
Village/Neighborhood:	Roxbury; Washington Park
Local No:	518
Year Constructed:	1915
Architect(s):	Carpenter, Albert J.; Waldman, C. H.
Architectural Style(s):	Colonial Revival
Use(s):	Church; Synagogue
Significance:	Architecture; Ethnic Heritage; Religion
Area(s):	BOS.AEW: Gaston - Otisfield Streets Area
Designation(s):	
Building Materials(s):	Wall: Brick; Cast Stone Foundation: Concrete Cinderblock



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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125
www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc

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11322

ADDRESS 9-15 OTISFIELD COR. (Blue Hill Ave)

NAME MT CALVARY Holy Church / CONG. SHAREI TA PHILA
present original

MAP No. 115 / 17N SUB AREA Rox / 6 Green Hill

DATE 1915-1916 / 1922 BP US 2, BUST, S
Schea source

ARCHITECT A. J. CARPENTER BP.
source

BUILDER _____
source

OWNER CONG. SHAREI TA PHILA / MT. CALVARY Holy Church
original present (1970)

PHOTOGRAPHS Rox #6 2/2 + 3*-81



TYPE (residential) single double row 2-fam. 3-deck ten apt.
(non-residential) SYNAGOG - CHURCH / SCHOOL

NO. OF STORIES (1st to cornice) 3 plus BASEMENT

ROOF FLAT cupola _____ dormers _____

MATERIALS (Frame) clapboards shingles stucco asphalt asbestos alum/vinyl
(Other) brick stone _____ concrete iron/steel/alum.
FOUNDATION

BRIEF DESCRIPTION
SIMPLE BRICK SYNAGOG OF ROMANESQUE - CLASSICAL
INTENT WITH FACADE ARCH AND STAR OF DAVID. NOW
GOSPEL CHURCH WITH GOLD LETTERS SIGN SET IN
CLASSIC PORTICO ENTRY BETWEEN SYNAGOG & SCHOOL

EXTERIOR ALTERATION minor moderate drastic _____

CONDITION good fair poor _____ LOT AREA 11,864 sq. feet

NOTEWORTHY SITE CHARACTERISTICS CURVE OF SIDE STREET
WITH PORTICO SET BETWEEN CHURCH AND SCHOOL

SIGNIFICANCE (cont'd on reverse)

EARLY SIDE STREET SYNAGOG WITH
ORIGINAL JEWISH MOTIFS ON FACADE
LATER SCHOOL BUILDING JOINED BY
CLASSIC PORTICO - NOW GOSPEL CHURCH

(Map)

Moved; date if known _____

Themes (check as many as applicable)

Aboriginal	_____	Conservation	_____	Recreation	_____
Agricultural	_____	Education	_____	Religion	_____
Architectural	✓	Exploration/ settlement	_____	Science/ invention	_____
The Arts	_____	Industry	_____	Social/ humanitarian	_____
Commerce	_____	Military	_____	Transportation	_____
Communication	_____	Political	_____		
Community/ development	✓				

Significance (include explanation of themes checked above)

EARLY JEWISH SYNAGOG & SCHOOL
 WITH ORIGINAL FEATURES - NOW
 BLACK CONGREGATION

Preservation Consideration (accessibility, re-use possibilities, capacity for public use and enjoyment, protection, utilities, context)

Bibliography and/or references (such as local histories, deeds, assessor's records, early maps, etc.)

BUILDING PACKETS
 — FURTHER RESEARCH ON HISTORY
 OF BOTH CONGREGATIONS.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

BOSTON

9-13 AND 15 OTISFIELD ST.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125**RECEIVED**
SEPT 24 2018
MASS. HIST. COMM.

Area(s) Form No.

BOS.AEW

BOS.11322,
BOS.18024

RECORDED BY: Gretchen M. Pineo, Virginia H. Adams, and Emily Giacomarra, The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL), February 2018.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Roxbury Hebrew School, 9-13 Otisfield Street (BOS.18024, 1921, Photos 1 and 2) is a Colonial Revival-style, three-story, five-bay-by-twelve-bay, brick building with a one-bay-by-one-bay entrance at its southeast corner. A one-story, three-bay-wide wall contains the primary entrance to the buildings and extends from the southeast corner of 9–13 Otisfield Street to the northwest corner of 15 Otisfield Street. The building is topped with a flat roof and rests on a concrete block foundation with a cast stone water table. A cast stone entablature runs along the northeast (facade) elevation between the first and second stories, and contains the year 5682 (1922) in Hebrew and two Stars of David. The facade and northwest elevations contain regularly spaced rectangular window openings with wood surrounds and cast stone sills and lintels in the facade and segmental, brick arches above the northwest and southeast window openings. Fenestration consists of replacement, one-over-one, double-hung, aluminum sash with rectangular transoms set above the windows on the northwest elevation.

Congregation Sharei Tfila/Mt. Calvary Holy Church, 15 Otisfield Street (BOS.11322, 1915, Photos 1 and 2) is a Colonial Revival-style, three-story, five-bay-by-eight-bay, brick building with a one-bay-by-one-bay entrance at its northwest corner accessed through the doorway in the connecting wall. The building is topped with a flat roof and rests on a concrete block foundation. The northeast (facade) elevation contains two main entrances on the first story entering at a raised basement level. Multi-paned, round-arched windows sit in the outer two bays on the first story with round-arched brick lintels. The second story of the facade contains three rectangular windows in the central bays with cast stone lintels and a wide single sill with cast stone panels containing two Stars of David. A tall arched window sits in the central bay of the third story surrounded by two short arched windows, each with cast stone key stones and round-arched brick lintels with cast stone keystones. A large round-arched brick pattern spans across the three windows from the second story to the roofline. Narrow rectangular windows sit in the outer bays of the second and third stories and have cast stone sills. Fenestration consists of a mix of original and replacement, one-over-one, two-over-two, and multi-paned, double-hung, wood and metal sash.

The two buildings at 9–13 and 15 Otisfield Street are connected by a one-story-tall wall, sited on the southwest side of Otisfield Street between the intersections with Gaston Street (north) and Blue Hill Avenue (southeast); no building permit was located for the wall. The wall is one story tall and three bays wide, and is constructed of cast concrete. The wall has three openings flanked by square pilasters topped with a full-width parapet. In the east and west bays are doors leading into the buildings at 9–13 and 15 Otisfield Street, both topped with single-light transoms and filled with modern doors. The doors are accessed by sets of three brick stairs with wrought iron railings. The center bay has a pair of iron gates, each with a Star of David in the center of the bottom panel, which leads to a center courtyard. A sign at the top of the gates says, "All Are Welcome, 1 Samuel" with verse numbers, some of which are unreadable due to deterioration. In the upper portion of each bay are three faded signboards which date to the Mt. Calvary Holy Church occupation of the buildings. The eastern sign, reads "Headquarters, Welcome," the center sign says, "Mt. Calvary Holy Church of America, Inc., Dr. Brumfield Johnson, Founder, Dr. Harold I. Williams, General Bishop," and the western sign says, "Johnson's Revival Center." The complex is adjacent to the street with a paved courtyard containing a fountain between the buildings and it is within a residential neighborhood (north) and abuts a vacant lot on Blue Hill Avenue (southeast).

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

One of the earliest synagogues in Boston was formed by a community of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in a rented space at 287 Hanover Street in Boston's North End. In 1888, the congregation purchased the Home for Little Wanderers on Baldwin Place (no longer extant), which became Temple Beth Israel (Heath 1999:17). In 1894, Congregation Adath Jeshurun, which emerged from the North End congregations, was established in Roxbury by a small, but growing, Jewish population. Initially, Adath Jeshurun met in a rented space in a building at the corner of Dudley and Washington streets. In 1900, the congregation moved to a synagogue in a three-story chapel at the corner of Blue Hill and Lawrence Avenues, two blocks south of Quincy Street (no longer extant), immediately adjacent to Otisfield Street on the east side of Blue Hill Avenue (Gamm 1999:63). The presence of a synagogue in Roxbury and Dorchester drew more Jewish residents to the area (Gamm 1999:66). Roxbury had about 50 Jewish families in 1903, and the growing population in Roxbury formed a

Continuation sheet 1

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

BOSTON

9-13 AND 15 OTISFIELD ST.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s)

Form No.

BOS.AEW

BOS.11322,
BOS.18024

large middle-class community (Heath 1999). In 1905–1906, the first major place of worship was constructed, the Congregation Adath Jeshurun, 397 Blue Hill Avenue (BOS.11136, NR listed 1999) a large, Romanesque-Revival-style building. Also in 1906, a small disaffected group, led by Simon Cabelinsky, divided from Adath Jeshurun to form Congregation Sharei Tfila, just a block north of the Adath Jeshurun synagogue on Otisfield Street. The offshoot intended to more strictly follow Talmudic, or Orthodox, law, as it seems that the group felt that Adath Jeshurun was not adhering as strictly to Orthodox tenets. Initially, Sharei Tfila was an example of a *shtibel*, or a small, congregation located typically in a converted house, in this case, a house at 15 Otisfield Street (Levine and Harmon 1992:39). Cabelinsky (1866–1939), an immigrant from Janova, Lithuania, came to Boston in 1890 with his wife Ida. By 1910, the pair were living on Intervale Street, just one street to the south, where they resided for the rest of their lives (US Census 1910).

In 1910, Sarah Goldman sold the property at 15 Otisfield Street to Harry J. Estey of Somerville, who, likely concurrently, sold the property to Sharei Tfila (SCRD 1910). In 1915, Catherine Henry sold 13 Otisfield Street to David Foster of Boston, who concurrently transferred the property to Sharei Tfila (SCRD 1915). The final parcel to be conveyed to the congregation was 9 Otisfield Street, purchased by Simon Cabelinsky from Charles Redmond and conveyed to Sharei Tfila the same day (SCRD 1923). The three lots were initially occupied by wood-frame houses, which were demolished in order to permit the construction of the brick Congregation Sharei Tfila/Mt. Calvary Holy Church, 15 Otisfield Street (1915). In 1915, a brick synagogue was constructed on the east portion of the property, replacing the original frame house that the congregation met in. The synagogue was designed by A.J. Carpenter and built by C.H. Waldman. In the 1921, Cabelinsky funded the construction of the first Hebrew school in Roxbury, the Roxbury Hebrew School, 9–13 Otisfield Street, on the west side of the property. The school was also designed by Carpenter (BISD). A continuous street presence and a wide internal courtyard were formed by the construction of a one-story gated brick wall between the street elevations of the synagogue and school. East of the synagogue was the Otisfield Grand Hall at 17–19 Otisfield Street (no longer extant), which held dances, marriages, and political speeches, among other community uses (*Boston Post* 1912; *Boston Globe* 1915; *The White Starr* 1922).

In 1959, 9–13 Otisfield Street was occupied by the Roxbury Hebrew School, the Maimonides School (now in Brookline), and the United Kosher Butcher Association, and the synagogue was still in use. However, the complexion of the neighborhood was shifting away from being predominantly Jewish (Polk 1959). During World War II (1941–1945), many Roxbury Jews left the neighborhood, preferring to move to single-family or two-family houses on larger lots in West Roxbury or Mattapan, while others moved to Brookline and Newton (Heath 1999:29). In the fall of 1961, Congregation Sharei Tfila disbanded, likely due to dwindling numbers, and sold the synagogue and school to the Mt. Calvary Holy Church, an African-American Pentecostal Church (Gann 1999:250–251). The location of any records for the synagogue are unknown, thus the exact circumstances of the closure of the synagogue are likewise unknown at this time. The Sharei Tfila cemetery, which Simon Cabelinsky was also instrumental in the creation of, was established in the 1920s at 776 Baker Street in West Roxbury (Mount Lebanon Jewish Cemeteries, BOS.815) (*Hebrew College Bulletin* 1976:15–16). It is likely that the former members of Sharei Tfila moved to West Roxbury, or to Brookline and Newton, which became centers of Jewish residents in the post-World War II (1941–1945) era (Heath 1991). Mt. Calvary Holy Church was founded in Winston-Salem, North Carolina in 1927 by Bishop Blumfield Johnson when Johnson left the United Holy Church of America along with 200 followers. Johnson next led a revival in Huntington, Long Island, New York, which resulted in a branch of the Mt. Calvary church being founded there as well. In 1929, Johnson and his followers traveled to Boston, where they chartered the Mt. Calvary Holy Church on July 27, 1929. The first headquarters for the church was in Baltimore, Maryland, followed by Buffalo, New York by 1942. In 1960, the headquarters moved to Boston, following a fire at the Buffalo headquarters. National Mt. Calvary Holy Church Convocations were held in Boston until an international headquarters was established in Washington, D.C. in 1991 (MCHCA 2018; DuPree 1996). In 1968, Mt. Calvary installed a swimming pool in the courtyard, which was replaced in 1990 and appears to be no longer extant. Through the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the buildings were used as a church and soup kitchen, as well as providing day treatment for mentally ill patients (BISD). In 1980, Bishop Nellie Yarborough of the Mt. Calvary Holy Church was one of several African-American ministers in Boston calling for peaceful protests in the wake of the killing of Gerald White in Codman Square in Dorchester (Blackstone 1908). Bishop Yarborough was also responsible for organizing the soup kitchen and other public outreach programs in the neighborhood (BISD).

Today, the entire property is owned by the Mt. Calvary Holy Church, with 9–13 Otisfield Street occupied by the Bibleway Christian Center.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

BOSTON

9-13 AND 15 OTISFIELD ST.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s)

Form No.

BOS.AEW

BOS.11322,
BOS.18024*AJ Carpenter (1885–1970)*

Albert J. (or AJ) Carpenter was born in the Boston area in 1885, and by 1900, his family was living in Jamaica Plain. His father, John Carpenter, was a custodian. In 1900, AJ was employed as a shoe maker, but ten years later, he was living at 39 Dunreath Street in Roxbury and working as an architect. Little is known about his architectural training. Numerous projects attributed to Carpenter are listed in the Massachusetts Cultural Resources Inventory System (MACRIS), including a commercial block at 238–252 Harvard Street (1913, BKL.2514) in Brookline, the R.F. Whitehead Block, 51–63 Harvard Avenue (1913, BOS.8224) in Boston, and the Daniel P. Collins Building, 727–729 Atlantic Avenue (115, BOS.1520). He also designed the William Lloyd Garrison School, 20 Hutchings Street (1910, BOS.12782), and numerous residences, ranging from single-family dwellings to apartment buildings (Larson Fischer Assoc. 2011).

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BOS.AEW

BOS.11322,
BOS.18024

PHOTOGRAPHS (February 2018, PAL)



Photo 1. (R to L) Roxbury Hebrew School and Congregation Sharei Tfila/Mt. Calvary Holy Church, 9–13 and 15 Otisfield Street, looking southwest.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

BOSTON

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Area(s) Form No.

BOS.AEW

BOS.11322,
BOS.18024



Photo 2. Entrance, Roxbury Hebrew School and Congregation Sharei Tfila/Mt. Calvary Holy Church, 9-13 and 15 Otisfield Street, looking southwest.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

BOSTON

9-13 AND 15 OTISFIELD ST.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Form No.

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BOS.AEW

BOS.11322,
BOS.18024

National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form

Check all that apply:

- Individually eligible Eligible **only** in a historic district
- Contributing to a potential historic district Potential historic district

Criteria: **A** **B** **C** **D**

Criteria Considerations: **A** **B** **C** **D** **E** **F** **G**

Statement of Significance by Gretchen M. Pineo and Virginia H. Adams, PAL, April 2018

The synagogue Congregation Sharei Tfila/Mt. Cavalry Holy Church (15 Otisfield Street, 1915) and the associated Roxbury Hebrew School (9-13 Otisfield Street, 1921), two buildings joined by street wall sheltering a central courtyard, are individually eligible for listing on the National Register under Criterion A in the area of Social History for their role in the development of Otisfield and Gaston Streets within the Grove Hall neighborhood of Roxbury and Dorchester as a predominantly Russian Jewish neighborhood in the early twentieth century. The complex is further significant in the area of Social History for its association with the emergence of an African-American neighborhood which supplanted the Jewish neighborhood in the mid-twentieth century. In 1961, the synagogue and school purchased by the African-American Mt. Calvary Holy Church, a Pentecostal denomination. The shift in building use from a Jewish synagogue to an African-American church reflects the changing demographic of the neighborhood and surrounding area. Criterion Consideration A is met, as the complex is eligible for listing for Social History.